Holy Communion Is an Artifact of the Future[1]

Walter R. Bouman

A bit of reminiscing seems appropriate on this anniversary occasion.[2] The Institute of Liturgical Studies was founded by true pioneers in the liturgical movement. The blessings granted to that movement in terms of its achievements are awesome. I don't know if anyone counted such things in the 1940s, but in the decade in which the Institute of Liturgical Studies was founded there were not a hundred congregations in all of North American Lutheranism where there was a weekly Eucharist.

At Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in the early 1950s, we were not allowed to celebrate the Eucharist on campus because we were not an official congregation. Arthur Carl Piepkorn, who joined the Concordia faculty in 1951, was permitted to demonstrate Luther's *Formula Missae* of 1523, and his *Deutsche Messe* of 1526, but without an actual consecration of the elements and without communion. The words of institution were sung from the balcony of the seminary chapel, and the authorities made certain that there were no elements in the vessels used in the demonstration. In 1953–54, my final year in seminary, we students walked about twenty minutes to Luther Memorial Lutheran Church in Richmond Heights, where the pastor arranged for Eucharist on Friday evenings to accommodate a growing eucharistic piety among seminary students.

The liturgical pioneers were the targets of militant polemical attack. Their efforts to reclaim the catholicity of Lutheranism, to recover the catholic practices that were characteristic of the Lutheran territorial churches in the sixteenth century, were described derisively as "chancel prancing," and they were routinely accused of "Romanizing tendencies." Some recent events make one wonder whether much has changed. In Germany similar anti-catholicism surfaced with regard to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. An article by a university professor in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, Germany's leading newspaper,

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[1]The title comes from Herbert O'Driscoll, an Anglical priest and liturgist.

[2]For a brief history of Lutheran liturgical renewal, see Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 622–628.

accused the staff of the Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical Research of being "*krypto-Katholiken*" and "*falsche Brüder*."

Our liturgical ancestors wanted to be orthodox Lutherans. They were careful to emphasize that the sacraments had equality with the Word in Lutheran worship, an emphasis that occasionally led to interesting innovations. Berthold von Schenk, pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in the Bronx and one of the most colorful of the liturgical pioneers, had an ambry with the reserved sacrament and a vigil light on one side of the chancel. There was a Bible resting on a missal stand on a table on the other side of the chancel with a *second* vigil light burning near it. Von Schenk explained to me that this was the "reserved word," since word and sacrament had parity in the Lutheran Church!

While Lutherans were trying to recover their sixteenth century heritage, Roman Catholic leaders in liturgical renewal were laying the groundwork for the reforms that were eventually introduced by the Second Vatican Council. As a seminarian I sometimes went to Holy Cross Catholic Church on the north side of St. Louis, where Father Martin B. Hellriegel was pastor. Hellriegel was a pioneer in introducing the dialogue mass to congregations. While he was saying the Mass in Latin at the altar, a layman, vested in cassock and cotta, was saying or chanting many of the priest's words in English at a microphone on the floor of the nave. The congregation was saying or singing the responses and the liturgical canticles in English. Religious instruction in Hellriegel's parochial school was based on the liturgy. The wonderful children's choir of the parish recorded an Advent novena, based on the great "O Antiphons," which became a best selling record of the Liturgical Press.

Father Hellriegel, always gracious to the seminarians who visited his parish, introduced me to Godfrey Diekmann. On a visit to St. John's Abbey I met Frank Kacmarcik, who since then has been liturgical consultant for the building of many Lutheran churches, including the Gloria Dei Worship Center at Trinity Seminary. He in turn introduced me to Maurice Lavanoux, longtime editor of *Liturgical Arts*.[3] These good folk and many others helped us mount a major show of liturgical art at Concordia Seminary in fall 1953. All of this cooperation between Lutherans and Roman Catholics was so suspect forty-five years ago that Concordia Seminary did not know what to do with the gift of some art presented to it by Sister Mary Corita Kent of Immaculate Heart College

[3]For a lovingly told history of the Liturgical Arts Society, see Susan J. White, *Art, Architecture, and Liturgical Reform* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1990).

in Los Angeles, California. The gift, a series of prints on the seven words of Jesus from the cross, was "mislaid" and has never been found.

These Roman Catholic and Lutheran pioneers did so much for contemporary art and architecture in the service of liturgical renewal. It was just forty-seven years ago that Eliel Saarinen was designing one of the first great contemporary Christian buildings in the United States: Christ Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. It is good to remember there was a time when these things could not be taken for granted, to remind ourselves of the struggle in which our ancestors were engaged and to gather courage from their example for the challenges we face today. During the lifetime of this institute, during the last half of this century, we have come from less than one hundred Lutheran parishes with weekly Eucharist to more than 4,000 Lutheran parishes with weekly Eucharist.

The Weekly Eucharist

You can guess from these reminiscences that the primary concern of this lecture is the weekly Eucharist. The earliest publicity for this institute asked a question: At its fiftieth anniversary, the Institute turns to the church's eschatological tradition: God's future is already making all things new. "How, then, shall we pray and worship?" That question can be answered in a single phrase: the weekly Eucharist. But to stop there means not only that I would have nothing more to say during the time allotted for this lecture, but also that the grounding and the consequences of that answer would be unexamined and unexpressed.

It is now commonplace for both historians and theologians to recognize that neither Jesus nor his disciples founded a religion, founded the church. Christianity began as a movement, a messianic movement within Judaism. I first came upon this insight in a beautiful little booklet, *Priest and Bishop*, written shortly after the Second Vatican Council by Raymond Brown. There he writes:

> Many of our assumptions about the early Christian community flow from the erroneous supposition that Christianity was thought of as a new religion with its own religious institutions. But our best evidence is exactly to the contrary: at the beginning Christians constituted a movement within Judaism, differing only in some features (especially in the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, that with him God had inaugurated the eschatological time, and that therefore Gentiles could now participate fully in the blessings of Israel without formally adopting all the precepts of the Law of Moses). The Christians understood themselves as the renewed Israel,

not immediately as the new Israel; and they expected that soon all the children of Israel would join this renewal movement.[4]

This insight and perspective changes, among other things, how we must view the writings that eventually made up the New Testament. These writings are not a textbook on theology, nor a manual on the liturgy, nor the constitution for a new religion. These writings are movement literature. We ask in vain that these writings contain a complete set of rites and rituals, that they give us a polity, that they supply us with creeds and doctrines, or even that they identify a collection of normative writings, a canon of Holy Scripture. But that does not mean we are left without guidance as to the structure and form of the church. It means, rather, that we must pay careful attention to the early centuries of Christianity, to the way in which this messianic movement within Judaism became a religious institution, the Christian Church. Let me attempt a brief historical reconstruction of the move from messianic movement to Christian Church.[5]

Jesus was/is the Messiah of Israel—and of the world. He inaugurated the reign of God, God's project for the world.[6] After his resurrection, his earliest disciples were a messianic *movement* within Israel.[7] The literature available to us is "movement" literature: the occasional writings of Paul, the Gospels, and other writings. Instead of an organizational polity there is at first ad hoc, charismatic leadership. There is neither dogma nor creed. There is only "witness" to the resurrection, to the good news that with the resurrection the messianic age has come. The disciples are called and understand themselves to be witnesses to Jesus as Messiah, to the

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[4]Raymond E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), 17.

[5]I am indebted for much of what follows to L. William Countryman, "The Gospel and the Institutions of the Church with Particular Reference to the Historic Episcopate," in *Concordat of Agreement: Supporting Essays*, ed. Daniel F. Martensen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 17–30. See also Leonhard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, trans. Robert A. Guelich (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970), 152–221. Goppelt refers to these structures as "forces which gave form to the church," and his sequence is canon, creed, polity, and liturgy.

[6]The best description of Jesus' historical message and mission can be found in N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 147ff.

[7]Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 72–73.

coming of the reign of God. Their early use of *ekklesia* was to identify their movement, not to separate themselves from Israel and synagogue, nor to define a new religious institution.

The term *ekklesia* is a secular Greek word for "public assembly." It simply means a "coming together" or "being together." Perhaps both meanings can be expressed in the term "gathering." As a gathering the *ekklesia* derives its specifically Christian character from what takes place in the gathering. The gatherings described in the documents of the New Testament do something specifically messianic: they engage in prayer to Jesus or in the name of Jesus; they experience a sharing or fellowship in the power of the Holy Spirit; they attend to the "teaching" of the "apostles"; and they celebrate the messianic meal, namely, the "breaking of bread." (Acts 2:42)

The messianic movement increasingly required the living elements or structures of an institutional organization as it was increasingly distanced from and by 90 A.D. forced out of Judaism. Unless a movement acquires the living elements of an institution, it does not and cannot perpetuate itself. It has neither viability nor continuity. Its concerns or agenda cannot be transmitted to succeeding generations. The institutional living elements which the messianic movement of Jesus' disciples developed can be identified as the following four structures:

Liturgy. The roots are evident already in the New Testament.[8] It is the messianic meal, to which the synagogue service eventually "migrates" when the disciples can no longer gather with the synagogue. By the end of the first century (Revelation of John) and certainly by the beginning of the second century, the liturgy looks very much as described by Justin Martyr in 150 A.D.

Polity. There is no specific polity in the New Testament. The "twelve" continue as a sign within Israel of Israel's renewal (Acts 1:15–26). They function alongside the "seven" (Acts 6), who are not "deacons," but a kind of corporate leadership group for Greek-speaking participants in the movement. The "apostles" are not identical with the "twelve," although the "twelve" understand themselves to be "apostles." In addition, there are individuals and groups of two and three. By the end of the first century there are polities derived both from the synagogue (elders, 1 Pet) and from Greco-Roman society (bishops and deacons, Phil 1:1). Asia Minor seems to be the beginning of the polity eventually identified as normative by Hippolytus of Rome at the beginning of the third

[8]Acts 2:42, 46; Acts 20:7; Rom 12:1; and 1 Cor 11:17–34 are among the many indications available.

century.[9] Leadership is exercised by bishops, presbyters, and deacons. Governance is set within the context of the liturgy, and eventually all the offices have to do with who presides and who fulfills other functions within the Christian liturgy.

Canon for Holy Scripture. The original "canon" was, of course, the Jewish scriptures at the time of Jesus: the Law and the Prophets. The full "canon" of the Old Testament does not become finalized until the rabbinic "council" of Jamnia in 90 A.D. It may be that the final canonical decisions were directed *against* the Christian messianic movement. The Jewish scriptures are quoted in the writings of the New Testament. In the second century the conflict with gnosticism requires the emerging institutional church to publish lists of postresurrection writings that could be read in the liturgies of the church. By the third and fourth centuries our present canon seems to be in place, although there is never any formal action on the canon by an ecumenical council.

Dogma or Creed. The beginnings of dogma are to be found in credal formulas like 1 Corinthians 12:3, "Jesus is Lord." By the end of the second century Tertullian identified a *regula fidei*, a rule of faith, a summary of Christian witness associated primarily with baptism. The first ecumenical council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) formulated the dogmatic foundation for the Trinity, the confession of the God to be worshiped if Jesus is indeed the Messiah. The Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) completed the entire creed, and the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) formulated the christological dogma implicit in the Nicene Creed.

I want to make three observations about these structures of the institutional church. First of all, Lutheranism, especially in the United States, persists in emphasizing the latter two of these structures: the canon of Holy Scripture and the credal, dogmatic, confessional element. We regard these two as normative for the church, and we don't regard liturgy and polity as normative, although all four have their roots in the writings that make up the New Testament, and all four are equally post-New Testament in achieving mature form.

The ELCA adopted a fine document on the use of the means of grace at Philadelphia in 1997, but this document does not have the force of

[9]Editor's note: Bouman here is referring to the ancient church order, *Apostolic Tradition*. Recent scholarship has called into question its authorship and date. See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 80–83.

liturgical "law."[10] There are only recommendations that clergy and congregations may or may not follow. The consequence is that one never knows in two-thirds of the parishes of the ELCA whether or not there will be Eucharist on any given Sunday and whether or not the church's worship book is used with some integrity. The document produced by the Task Force on the Study of Ministry, which was adopted by the ELCA in 1993, stated as a matter of principle that the church can have whatever polity it wants to have or needs to have for the sake of mission. It did not ask how the church's mission is best served by the normative polity of the church. One of the major arguments advanced by the opponents of the Concordat with the Episcopal Church is that the absence of a polity in the New Testament writings means there can be no normative polity for the church at all.

Second, the latter three of the four structural elements that came to maturity in the early centuries of the church's history were born partially or largely out of controversy. Bishops became a rallying point and a source of encouragement in times of persecution. As individuals and as a corporate body, they became a source of authoritative teaching in the face of heresy with regard to the gospel. Their "networking" and communion became a sign and an instrument of unity and collegiality in the midst of the pluralism of the Roman Empire.

While the baptismal creed originated as a positive act of witness to the gospel, the Nicene Creed and the formula of Chalcedon arose because the Arian assault on the full divinity of Jesus, the Son, was recognized as an assault on the gospel itself. The original version of the Nicene Creed concluded with a condemnation:

> But, those who say, Once he was not, or he was not before his generation, or he came to be out of nothing, or who assert that he, the Son of God, is of a different *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or that he is a creature, or changeable, or mutable, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.[11]

The canon of the New Testament had its beginnings as gnostic documents began to multiply in the latter half of the second century. Lists circulated by bishops identified for the congregations which writings

[10]Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

[11]John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1963), 31.

among the many in existence could be read in the Sunday liturgy. Only a few, eventually twenty-seven, of the documents numbering five or six times that number, were regarded as giving authentic access to the event which constituted the good news of Christianity and as being normative for the proclamation of that good news.[12]

Only the liturgy, the Eucharist, was born simply out of joyful witness to the good news. The end-time has come! The messianic banquet is to be celebrated.[13] It is sad this messianic banquet has become the locus for controversy, condemnation, and exclusion. It is good that it is now the center of efforts to reunite the separated traditions of Christianity, that "full communion" is the goal of ecumenical endeavors.

Third, not only did the liturgy come to expression as joyful witness to the good news. It is the positive locus for the other three structures of the church. Polity, scripture, and creed are dependent upon and find their primary location within the liturgy. Gordon Lathrop relates them as follows:

> The most basic and constitutive sense of the word "church" refers to the communal gathering around washing, texts, and meal, as these are interpreted as having to do with Jesus Christ.... For a moment, imagine the illumination that might come from saying it this way: The Bible is the assembly's book. "Church" is preeminently the assembly. Preaching does not take place in a vacuum but within the action and discipline of the assembly. Dogma is embodied in the assembly. It even can be argued that the symbol-bearing Christian leaders—bishops, preachers, pastors, ministers—gain their importance among us primarily because they are servants of the assembly.[14]

The theological significance of this development must not escape us. Jesus is the grounding of the good news both in the history of God and in the history of the world. Something "happens" both to God and to the world in the death and resurrection of Jesus: the *eschaton* or outcome of history is disclosed. Jesus is identified as the "Son of man," that final

[12]See Wilhelm Schneemelcher, Robert McLachlan Wilson, and Edgar Hennecke, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vols. 1 and 2, trans. A.J.B. Higgins et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963–65).

[13]This is a theme that I have developed more extensively in "Identity and Witness: Liturgy and the Mission of the Church," in *With Hearts and Hands and Voices*, ed. Randall R. Lee. The Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers 6 (Valparaiso, IN: Institute of Liturgical Studies, 1989), 124–129.

[14]Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 9–10.

judge, according to the imagery of Daniel, who has the last word. The world is therefore no longer under the power of death, and when it lives as if it were still under the power of death, it is not only living sinfully; it is living anachronistically.

The community that comes from Jesus is the *means* of the good news, the means by which the good news is audible and visible in the world. Hence the disciples of Jesus the Messiah are the eschatological community (i.e., the community that witnesses to the eschatological event of Jesus by being the community called to anticipate the eschatological consummation). Gerhard Lohfink says it most bluntly: "The *sole* meaning of the entire activity of Jesus is the gathering of God's eschatological people."[15]

Jesus' promise was to eat the meal of the covenant new with them in the coming of God's redemptive reign. The signs of God's redemptive reign in the new age—forgiveness, peace, justice, compassion, and the redemption of creation—are present *to* the disciples, but also *through* the disciples! The community that comes from Jesus bears witness to the fact that the new age is present in the midst of the old age by offering itself into the service of the reign of God and by being free to suffer for such offering and service.

This new community belongs *necessarily* to the gospel. The church as gathered eschatological community is not incidental to the gospel. It is essential to the gospel. Human existence is communal existence. The fallen character of humanity does not mean the absence of community, but rather the fallen character of community, the enslavement of community to the demonic powers, the alienation of persons within community. The quality of the eschatological community as shaped by the gospel is that it is community in freedom rather than in fear, community in truth rather than community in deceit, community in servanthood rather than in competition, community in admonition and repentance rather than in accusation and self-vindication, vulnerable community rather than aggressive/protective community.

The meaning of the "necessity" of the community in relation to the gospel is now clear. The community is necessary, first, as *outcome* of the gospel, as the messianic people called to anticipate the messianic age; and second, as *agent* of the gospel, as means of the gospel, *never as condition* of the gospel, *never as grounds* of the gospel. For the gospel is always the antithesis of ecclesiological idolatry and tyranny.

[15]Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 26.

The theological connection between church and Eucharist is basic and direct. The church is a necessary dimension of the gospel, the good news that Jesus is risen, that Jesus is the Messiah, that the reign of God has begun. And the Eucharist is necessary for the being of the church, because the church exists only as it is a eucharistic community. That is why the liturgy, the celebration of the messianic meal, is the earliest and the indispensable structure of the church. Ferdinand Hahn can therefore describe the worship of the earliest church as follows:

> The "coming together" of the faithful is the significant feature of Christian worship; and where the community comes together, God is praised, the mighty acts are proclaimed, prayers are said, and the Lord's Supper is celebrated.[16]

The church required transition from movement to institution in order to be itself, in order to transmit with fidelity the gospel of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus, in order to serve and share the hope of the reign of God. Being an institution meant having institutional structures. These structures are both fixed and flexible, providing continuity with both past and future, and being capable of adaptation to time and place.

Because the earliest disciples of Jesus understood themselves to be experiencing the arrival of the messianic age, the first of these structures is the liturgy of the eschatological messianic meal. It is first in importance not only in chronology but also in primacy. Because the church is not a "mob" driven by its own spirit, not an institution in the service of the powers of survival in the face of death but is rather a community animated by the Holy Spirit who is the "down payment" on the future, its governance and polity is the structure of a servant ministry rooted in the eschatological messianic meal. Because the gospel, the "good news" of the church is an eschatological event which has taken place in time, the church has the structure of canonical scripture which serves it both by giving the church access to that which has taken place (and thus is "source") and by giving it a standard for its proclamation and hope (and thus is "norm"). Because the gospel is under assault from rival and false "gospels" (Gal 1:6-9), the church has the structure of dogma, its "law of teaching," by which it confesses the triune God of the gospel.

[16]Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 36.

A problem area in Lutheran theology has been the distinction between the visibility and the invisibility of the church. Because the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, refers to the church as "the assembly of all believers" (German: *die Versammlung aller Glaubigen*) or "the assembly of saints" (Latin: *congregatio sanctorum*), the Lutheran scholastic theologians of the seventeenth century asserted that the true church is invisible, since "church" is defined by genuine faith or authentic sainthood. Only God knows who are true believers, true saints.[17] The visible church, the institution that administers gospel and sacraments, is called "church" only because believers are in its midst.

This understanding of the true church as invisible made scholastic Lutherans and their descendants less concerned about church structure and consequently about the visible unity of the church. The church was obviously and indestructibly one because it was constituted by true believers, all true believers and only true believers. What believers believed was the gospel, and there is but one gospel. Visible unity was neither necessary nor was it a high priority. The Lutheran reform movement in the German "Holy Roman Empire" did not to this day result in a Lutheran Church of Germany. Nor were there structures of communion between the various territorial and national Lutheran churches in Europe. Nor were the missionaries and emigrants who founded the Lutheran churches in Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas concerned that there be one Lutheran church in the countries in which Lutherans settled.

The contrast with Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican emigrant and mission churches is evident. South Africa is a good example. The Anglican Church of South Africa encompassed both emigrant and native members. Throughout the years of apartheid the Anglican Church of South Africa was a witness against apartheid. During that same period there were five Lutheran churches in South Africa divided by race and tribe. The native tribal peoples were evangelized by Lutherans from different countries and churches, resulting in different Lutheran churches who were not in communion with each other. Throughout the years of apartheid the Lutherans were part of the problem, not a witness against the problem.

The Lutherans in the Americas are still living with the consequences of a lack of ecclesial structures to give expression to the visible unity of the church. In the nineteenth century there was a major inner-Lutheran debate

[17]Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 582–599.

about the nature of the church and its visible unity.[18] C.F.W. Walther upheld the scholastic distinction and emphasis that the true church was invisible.[19] But others, most notably Wilhelm Loehe, Julius Stahl, Theodor Kliefoth, and Theodosius Harnack pointed out that even in the Augsburg Confession the church is identified by its liturgy, that is, the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Hence, the confessors at Augsburg are careful to emphasize that the basically liturgical reforms introduced in their territories do not disrupt the unity of the church (for that is the whole point of Article VII). Further, they insist that even those "church usages that have been established by men … are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church" (Article XV). Thus Philip Melanchthon wrote that the reformers "have given frequent testimony in the assembly to our deep desire to maintain the church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority" (Apology, Article XIV).

In this reading of the Lutheran Confessions, the church is visible when it is doing what the church is called to do: celebrate the meal according to the gospel and in the context of the meal preach the gospel. The church is visible when it is gathered for just this ritual. It is invisible when it is scattered, when those who have gathered for an identifiable liturgy are scattered to live in many neighborhoods, to work in many workplaces, to travel, to go on vacation, etc. As a pastor friend in California said to me when, on a visit in the middle of the week, I asked to see his church: "But Walter, we don't have time. They are all over."

Just as the church's being is visible when the church gathers for the Eucharist, so also the church's unity is visible. This unity finds its focus in whatever is required to celebrate the Eucharist. The foundational text is 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. It is impossible to do justice to the richness of this pericope. But it is helpful to take special note of several things.

First of all, St. Paul admonishes the congregation at Corinth because the divisions manifest themselves at the meal. Second, the meal identifies

[18]See Holsten Fagerberg, *Bekenntnis, Kirche, und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Uppsala, Sweden: A.B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1952), 195–270; and Walter R. Bouman, "The Unity of the Church in 19th Century Confessional Lutheranism" (Ph.D. diss., Heidelberg University, 1963).

[19]C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, 5th ed. (Zwickau im Sachsen, 1911).

them as "church," and when their divisions are evident at the meal, then they are not church. Third, the divisions represent a breakdown in Christian behavior; that is, the more affluent members who have been bringing the food and the wine are not sharing what they have brought with the poorer members of the community.

Four things come together here theologically: church, meal, unity, and ethics. The church is called to witness that the reign of God, God's project for the world, is grounded in Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah. Jesus will also be the final judge, the consummation of God's project for the world. That final consummation means the gathering and unity of all humanity, the participation of all creation in the peace and victory of the Triune God. The church witnesses to the grounding and consummation of the reign of God in Christ by its gathering to celebrate the messianic banquet. The church is called to anticipate that cosmic unity, to be a sign of the eschaton!

At the banquet three essential things happen. First of all, Jesus the Messiah comes to the meal from the future in the power of the Holy Spirit. Here we must deal especially with the differences that have historically divided Lutherans from the Reformed tradition. One good starting point is to take a second look at John Calvin's teaching on Christ's presence. It can be summarized in this quotation:

> The sum is, that the flesh and blood of Christ feed our souls just as bread and wine maintain and support our corporeal life. [Lutheran suspicions seem justified at this point, but stay with Calvin.] For there would be no aptitude in the sign, did not our souls find their nourishment in Christ. This could not be, did not Christ truly form one with us, and refresh us by the eating of his flesh, and the drinking of his blood. But though it seems an incredible thing that the flesh of Christ, while at such a distance from us in respect of place, should be food to us, let us remember how far the secret virtue of the Holy Spirit surpasses all our conceptions.... Therefore, what our mind does not comprehend let faith conceive—namely, that the Spirit truly unites things separated by space. That sacred communion of flesh and blood by which Christ transfuses his life into us, just as if it penetrated our bones and marrow, he testifies and seals in the Supper, and that not by presenting a vain and empty sign, but by there exerting an efficacy of the Spirit by which he fulfills what he promises.[20]

It is impossible to read this without recognizing that Calvin as well as Luther taught "the real presence," the consistent Christian view that the body and blood of Jesus are present, and each taught it in his own way.

[20]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Par. 10.

In writings beginning already in 1527 Luther developed a theory to account for the "real presence," a theory which later came to be called "the ubiquity doctrine," i.e., that after the ascension Christ is everywhere present, but his presence is *available to us* only where Christ has promised to be present, in the proclamation of the gospel and in the sacraments done in the gathered community.

I have understood this to be a cosmological explanation, and I have understood Calvin's formulation of a "spiritual presence" to have the potential for being an eschatological explanation, since the Holy Spirit is the eschatological *dunamis* of the church. However, I have come to think that perhaps Luther's "ubiquity theory" also has the potential to be an eschatological explanation, because it can be understood in the light of Albert Einstein's work with relativity.

The resurrection disappearances and the Lukan ascension narratives as the last of the disappearances are formulated in spatial terms that do not make sense to our contemporary cosmology. Luther understood these narratives in terms of the gospel: "heaven" and "the right hand of God" are where the gospel is active and victorious. Luther also indicates that the victory of the gospel is "hidden" until the *eschaton*, opening the way for Jürgen Moltmann to relate the disappearances to the eschatological future.[21] That would mean that Luther's explanation is not so much cosmological as eschatological.

Three aspects of the Einsteinian worldview come into play at this point.[22] (1) Time is a "fourth dimension," beyond the height, width, and breadth dimensions of space, so that if Christ is ascended to the final victorious future of the reign of God, the question of where Christ is located is spatially irrelevant. (2) Neither space nor time exist independently of matter, so that the coming of Christ to us from the future takes place in terms of the concrete bread and wine "in, with, and under" which is the concrete presence of the historically embodied Jesus in the form of that body and blood once-and-for-all-time offered for the world on the cross. (3) Because time is relative, "the question arises whether simultaneous events are possible;" that is, that events which happen at the

[21] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 88.

[22] See Hans Schwarz, *Our Cosmic Journey* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), 26–30.

same time may actually occur at different "local" times.[23] This means that the presence of Christ, which comes to us from the eschatological future and is available to us as the anticipatory power of the future in the bread and wine of the eucharistic meal, can occur at an infinite number of places simultaneously, although they actually occur at different "local" times. Martin Luther, meet Albert Einstein!

This means that Luther's conception of the ubiquity of the risen and ascended Christ is both eschatological and plausible. But Calvin's conception of Christ's "spiritual presence," is also an eschatological and plausible interpretation. For Christ is present in the power of the Spirit, the "down payment" on the *eschaton* (Eph 1:13–14, 2 Cor 1:22). This means that Christ's presence comes not from the past, a memory, a diminishing presence. Rather it comes from the future, "spiritually," an intensified presence.[24]

The point is that Christ's presence occurs in the context of a concrete gathering with a specific invocation of the Holy Spirit, that the promise of Jesus to eat and drink with the disciples in the coming of the reign of God happens, occurs, in the concrete eating and drinking of his offered body and blood "in, with, and under" the forms of bread and wine.

The second thing that occurs in the Eucharist is we participate in Christ's offering of himself for the world, for that is the meaning of St. Paul's retelling of the story of the meal on the night of Jesus' betrayal. We participate by being offered for the world, by the offering of ourselves into the service of the reign of God, God's project for the world. We are not offered to God anymore than Christ offered himself to the Father. Rather we are taken up into Christ's offering of himself, and thus Christ offers us to the world.

The third thing that occurs in the Eucharist is that all of humanity, indeed all of the creation, is encompassed by the reign of God, by God's project for the world. The rich are available to the poor, and vice versa. Everything that alienates is overcome by Christ on the cross. Everything that is alienated is brought home. The Eucharist is the place of unity.

Because the unity of the church is the being of the church, the church is visibly one at the messianic banquet table, or it is not the church. That is why there is urgency to the addressing of the challenge to be in full communion with the baptized everywhere. I want to say this carefully but

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[23]Ibid., 29.

[24]Robert Jenson, "The Holy Spirit," in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 145.

clearly: To the extent that the unity of the church is broken at the table, to that extent the church itself is broken. In our ecumenical endeavors we are not just making peace. We are becoming the church!

It is right, therefore, that the agreements which the ELCA has concluded and those which it is still addressing are about "full communion." That means we share everything that has to do with the table with each other, including the sharing of presiding ministers and the sharing of common witness and mission in our communities and in the world. Full communion between separated traditions also means that each tradition acknowledges and expects the other to represent the fullness of the catholicity. We do not have to be in the same place. This is not difficult where there are or have been comity arrangements. But it will be difficult where our traditions are in the same place. We will have to explore what that means.

In the meantime each of our traditions will have to ask ourselves whether we are in fact fully catholic. Do we each have continuity with the church through the institutions that emerged in its early centuries? When denominations exist side by side, we can offer the world a smorgasbord. Perhaps the sum total represents catholicity, but that does not make each tradition the one church, the catholic church.

For our separated traditions to be one and catholic, we will all have to change. We will all have something to give and something to receive. Will this affect what we do when we gather to be the church? Of course it will. But I submit that Lutherans, especially those of us who are committed to the renewal of the weekly Eucharist in the life of the congregation, have nothing to fear from full communion with churches of the Reformed tradition.

We need to learn that advocates of the weekly Eucharist will gain an ally in John Calvin. In 1537 Calvin wrote this in the Articles which he presented to the Geneva Council regarding the organization of church life:

> It would be desirable that the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ be in use at least once every Sunday when the congregation is assembled, in view of the great comfort which the faithful receive from it as well as the fruit of all sorts which it produces—the promises which are there presented to our faith, that truly we are partakers of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, His death, His life, His Spirit, and all His benefits, and the exhortations which are there made to us to acknowledge and by a confession of praise to magnify those wonderful things, the graces of God bestowed upon us, and finally to life as Christians, joined together in peace and brotherhood as members of the same body. In fact our Lord did not institute it to

be commemorated two or three times a year, but for a frequent exercise of our faith and love which the Christian congregation is to use *whenever it is assembled*.[25]

There will be other mutual benefits. The Reformed tradition has long emphasized the awesomeness and sovereignty of God. This emphasis is sorely needed to counteract the mood described by Edward Farley as "casual, comfortable, chatty, busy, humorous, pleasant, and at times even cute. This mood is a sign not of a sacred reality but of various congregational self-preoccupations."[26] Reformed worship has a long tradition of eucharistic prayer. Lutherans, at least in the United States, are in the process of learning Christ's presence among us is not dependent on the recitation of the so-called words of institution, but that Christ is received with the thanksgiving in which we remember the historical event, invoke the Holy Spirit, and anticipate the consummation of the reign of God. We Lutherans are perhaps a bit further along in retrieving the weekly Eucharist in our congregations. We can share our struggles and our achievements with our Reformed sisters and brothers.

What will our celebrations of the Eucharist look like after a generation of full communion? We can be certain they will be different, perhaps as different as ours today are from the celebrations of our parents and our grandparents. But we must keep the structure: to gather in the name of the triune God, to attend to the Word of God, to offer ourselves into the service of the reign of God, to be taken up into Christ's mission for the world in the thanksgiving meal.

The Eucharist is indeed, in Herbert O'Driscoll's provocative formulation, "an artifact of the future." Our Lord's ministry, death, and resurrection make us his body for the world. We know the final judge. We have already been given the verdict. St. Paul's wonderful words in 2 Corinthians 1:19–20 shout the mystery of faith:

> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not "Yes and No"; but in him it is always "Yes." For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God.

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[25]Quoted by Howard Hageman, *Pulpit and Table* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962), 25, emphasis mine. Hageman's entire book, and especially the final chapter, "Toward a Reformed Liturgic," has been influential in the preparation of the latest materials for worship in the Presbyterian Church USA and other churches of the Reformed tradition.

[26]Edward Farley, "A Mission Presence," *The Christian Century*, 115, no. 9 (March 18–25, 1998): 276.

It has been the vocation of this institute so to teach us to pray and worship.
It is called to continue to do so.